Notes on Strategies of Experimental Theatrical Voice

from *The Gas Heart* (1921) to a *Bondage Dance* (1990)

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This essay was written in 1991, but for a variety of reasons, I did not publish it and moved on to other projects. Some of these reasons I explain in note 9 at the end of the essay. I have made only very minor changes to the original manuscript, and thus references to work produced after 1990 occur only in the illustrations and notes. I forgot about the essay until I discovered it in an ancient, neglected file. It is especially interesting for its description of highly imaginative student experimental performance work.

Many manifestations of postmodern performance have disturbed modernist perceptions of realism, especially in relation to speech in performance. Responsibility for these complications belongs in large part to the interdisciplinary strategies defining postmodern consciousness, to a pervasive inclination to "appropriate" or "quote" the numerous signs of "otherness" structuring sexual, cultural, and political "differences" within a particular social context. Realism is a sign of modernity in that it insists upon the historical specificity of any representation. Language, then, is realistic insofar as it issues from or designates a highly specific time and place (or "environment"). But a problem with realism in its "normal" theatrical mode is that it tends to link a performing body to the production of a single "voice" which is the result of a single, unique set of historical pressures. The idea that different "voices" from different historical "contexts" issue from a single body is not something that "modern" drama, especially in the last few decades, has explored with much success or even enthusiasm.[1] However, various manifestations of postmodern performance assert that a sufficiently "realistic" deployment of voice entails the perception of voice as a complex ventriloquization of historically specific codes which ideology has inscribed within a body. Of course, once a body begins to speak in different voices, it becomes difficult to keep the "story" of the body under control, carefully regulated by the concept of "character," for a character is always the product of a uniquely consistent language. Thus, these postmodern deployments of voice project a serious skepticism toward the power of narrative to "control" the body or keep performance "under control."

Some strands of modernist performance, particularly those hostile to realism, acknowledged very boldly that the body "contains" different voices. For example, Tristan Tzara's (1896-1963) *The Gas Heart* (1921) presents a scene in which several parts of a body talk to each other in a rather incoherent fashion, dramatizing well the perception that language has no power to unify the body or produce a unified identity for the speaker. The body is a complex of contradictory impulses and language is always simultaneously the source and sign of difference. Arnolt Bronnen's (1895-1959) *Die Exzesse* (1923) includes a complicated scene in which a man and a woman, in love

with each other but separated from each other by hundreds of miles, conduct dialogues with their mirror images. The man speaks to his image and the image speaks back; the woman likewise converses with her own image. But then the author constructs the scene in such a way that the spectator perceives both dialogues as components of a single dialogue between masculine and feminine modes of self-perception: what keeps man and woman "apart" is the language which constructs the "difference" between the self and its "image." The self is "other" than the voice which speaks it. Bronnen develops the idea of the "other" voice in the body being the voice of the other sex, with the implication that, within the self, this "voice" of the other sex speaks most overtly when the self encounters its image.[2]

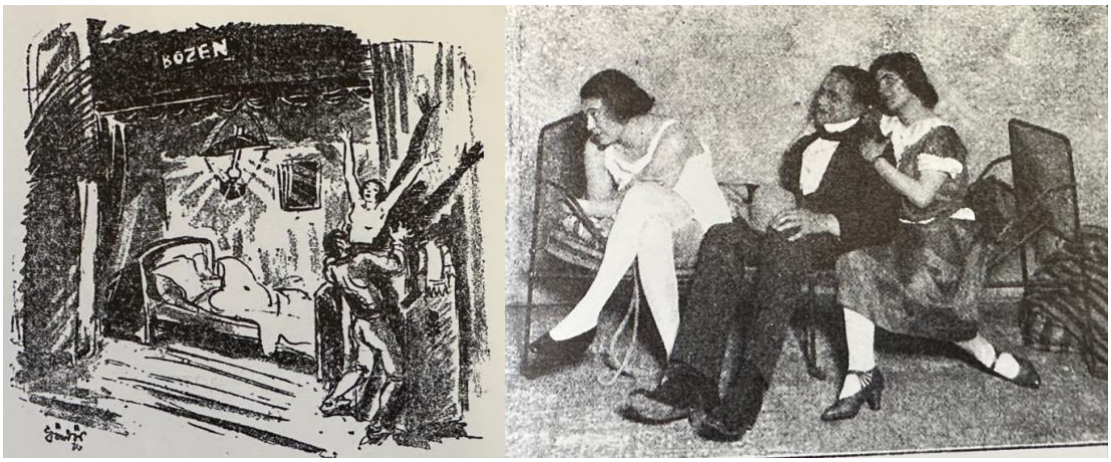

Figure 1: Left: Expressionist scene sketch by Gündür for a production of Arnolt Bronnen's Die Exzesse *at the Theater in der Königgrätzer Straße, Berlin, directed by Heinz Hilpert (1890-1967), 1926; right: Gerda Müller (1894-1951), Aribert Wäsche (1895-1961), and Till Klockow (1908-1970) in* Die Exzesse*, directed by Moritz Seeler (1896-1942) at the Lessing Theater, Berlin, 1925. Photo sources: Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach; Friedbert Aspetsberger,* >arnolt bronnen< Biographie*, Vienna: Böhlau, 1995.*

Another strategy for dramatizing the multiplicity of voices within the body is the use of "speech choirs," found in expressionist political theatre of the 1920s. The grandiose dance-drama *Totenmal* (1930), choreographed by Mary Wigman (1886-1973) and written by Albert Talhoff (1888-1956), features speech which is syntactically and semantically "the same," no matter who speaks it. But those who speak it consist of several male and female choirs, combinations of choirs, and combinations of voices from different choirs: thus, the perception emerges that "the same language," circulating through many bodies, creates only an illusory unity or "community" of voices, for although "the same language" cannot really "individualize" even the occasional solo speaker, it does signify the profound loneliness of the speaker(s). We do not "understand" each other, we do not produce "communication," merely because we speak "the same language," speak the way the "community" expects us to speak.[3] An equally fascinating strategy for revealing "other" voices within a single body appears in Alban Berg's opera *Lulu* (1935). The composer designates three modes of voice for individual performers: speech, singing, and *Sprechgesang*, which is neither speech nor singing, but a kind of chanting that requires its own special, complicated notation in the score. Berg (1885-1935) was not the first to introduce *Sprechgesang* or to combine the three modes of voice, but none of the expressionists who used the

strategy went as far as he did in limiting the freedom of the performer to interpret the language of the text. The text rigorously prescribes a multitude of performance variables, and one cannot escape the perception that the disclosure of "other" voices within the body depends on a monumentally deterministic idea of reality and action. The other voice is ever a thing inscribed into the body by an all-powerful author.[4]

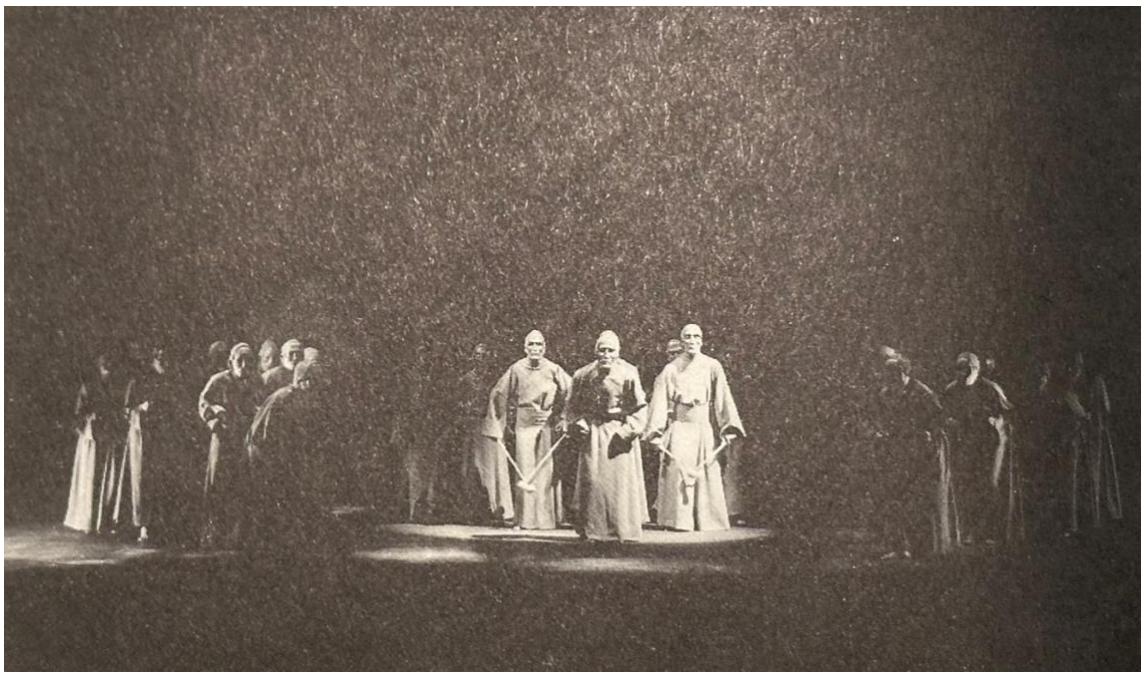

Figure 2: Scene of male speaking choir in the "war memorial" dance drama, Totenmal*, choreographed by Mary Wigman, Munich, 1930. Photo source: Mary Wigman Archive; Susan Manning,* Ecstasy and the Demon, Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p. 156.*

A contrary notion of voiced otherness came from Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), who, in the 1930s, argued that another voice could issue from the body only when the voice becomes detached not only from any text (inscription), but from language itself. Theoretically, the "hieroglyphic" or "incantatory" voice needs no narrative context to achieve a "visceral" impact upon either the performer or the spectator. The growling of beasts, the buzzing of insects, and the chirping of birds, in themselves, can awaken in us powerful reservoirs of emotion lying dormant in the unconscious, even though we do not know what these creatures are "saying" when they "speak" to each other. Just so can the human voice, when detached from narrative, text, and language, penetrate, with surgical precision, deeply into zones of human identity which instruments of rationality have repressed with such sick consequences. Artaud had an acute sense of the voice as a pulsating organism, a piece of flesh, but he himself was not able to translate this sense into a persuasive performance practice. Serious practitioners of his theory emerged only much later, in the 1960s, with people like Hermann Nitsch (1938-2022), Sylvano Bussotti (1931-2021), and Jim Morrison (1943-1971). But even they needed a linguistic text to motivate a voice which was otherwise as "visceral" and "hieroglyphically" unintelligible as the cries of animals. Perhaps the most successful realization of Artaud's strategy for disclosing "other" voices within the body was the hysteria-

driven rock concert perfected in the 1970s.

Figure 3: Voice and body engulfed and amplified by a vast technological apparatus in David Bowie's (1947-2016) Glass Spider tour, 1987, performing the song "Bang, Bang." Photo source: YouTube channel jtaka 3710.

Popular rock concerts, however, revealed with stunning intensity what was already implied in the other, "avant-garde" modernist strategies for deploying the voice: the efforts of theatrical performance to disclose "other" voices within the body coincided with a dramatic escalation in the technological complexity of the performance as a whole, so that the construction of the other voice entailed an extravagant pressure on theatre to test the limit of its material resources. Indeed, from a technical perspective, *The Gas Heart* or *Die Exzesse* is probably more difficult to stage than was, say, David Bowie's (1947-2016) Glass Spider concert (San Jose, 1988), which, besides requiring an enormous range of spectacular lighting effects, computerized imagery on giant video screens, and elaborate electro-acoustic hardware, had the singer make his entrance from a glittering helicopter suspended above the stage. The power of a "strange" voice is apparently such that, even though the body from which it issues does not itself become physically greater through performance, the space inhabited by the body "containing" other voices becomes far "greater" through the technological complexity that defines it.[5] Nowadays of course postmodern performance can rely on a sophisticated array of electronic and computer technologies which can distort, amplify, store, retrieve, reproduce, synthesize, fragment, and mix voices with such bewildering ingenuity that performers and authors alike seem paralyzed by the possibilities, for it is very difficult to find performances, even in the otherwise convention-bound realm of rock culture, which really seek to test the capacities of these technologies. Artaud understood well that, as the technological complexity of theatre intensifies on the "visceral" level, the power of a "consistent" narrative voice

to “contain” the performance dissolves. But the perception that disclosure of other voices within the body depends on technological escalation is by no means total. In the emphatically politicized aesthetic of Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), for example, technology always remains subordinate to the “labor” of the “human” element in performance, the actor. The construction of the spectator’s “estrangement” (*Verfremdung*) from perceptual norms apparently derives from a rigorous practice of "quotation." If other voices within the body are actually those of transparent ideology, norms defining the perception of reality, then the ideological identity of these voices becomes clear only through a process of “defamiliarization” or “decontextualization,” in which the voice transmits language as if it were in quotation marks, as if the body were speaking what someone else says. But in his aesthetic writings, Brecht never provided an especially lucid theory of quotation, and it is still not clear what constitutes quotation. *Im Dickicht der Städte (In the Jungle of Cities)* (1923) "quotes" extensively from the plot and language of Johannes V. Jensen’s (1873-1950) 1904 Danish novel *Hjulet (The Wheel)*, as well as from Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), but Brecht modifies the quotation so inconsistently that it is by no means obvious if quotation is closer to parody, plagiarism, ventriloquism, allusion, translation, re-writing, re-inscription, or some kind of grotesque echo.[6] In any case, quotation does not necessarily work only on behalf of the political objectives which Brecht sought to achieve.

Figure 4: Scene from Bertolt Brecht’s Im Dickicht der Städte*, directed by Jan Friedrich (b. 1992), Oberhausen Theater, Oberhausen, Germany, 2021, with (left to right) Klaus Zwick, Daniel Rothaug (b. 1988), and Henry Morales. Photo: Isabel Machado Rios. Photo source: Oberhausen Theater. In the postmodern performance era, Brecht’s complicated use of quotation justifies the extravagant, distorted scenic and directorial choices (“physical theater”) that release the text from a historical context and saturate it with historical anachronisms to create a sort of collision with histories or converging realities.*

For example, Fernando Arrabal’s *The Grand Ceremonial* (1966) contains numerous lines in quotation marks. Although it is not evident how the actors should

differentiate quoted lines from unquoted ones, the reader of the text "sees" easily that at these moments the characters say what "others" expect them to say, rather than what they may desire to say. Quotation is therefore a form of mask. But by exposing the mask of ideology through quotation, Arrabal (b. 1932), in this surrealistic play about sadomasochistic bonding, dramatized an existential-psychoanalytic, rather than socio-political, perception of ideology. Arrabal's style of quotation differs substantially from that of Charles Ludlam's (1943-1987) *Bluebeard* (1970), in which nearly every line is a quotation from a huge range of sources in popular culture and dramatic literature, but none of these lines are in quotation marks. In this fantastic story of a mad doctor attempting in vain to invent a "third sex" on a sinister island, everything the characters say comes from somewhere else, and the implication is obvious that sexual identity is largely a construction of myths about sexual difference perpetuated by popular movies and the controls over perception exerted by archaic conventions defining genres. Perhaps the next step in this strategy of quotation is to exploit recording technology, so that performers lip synch the "original" voices from old movies, radio shows, and records, as was done in a 1989 La MaMa production of John Moran's (b. 1965) play about comedian Jack Benny (1894-1974), in which all the speech consisted of voices from Benny's movies, radio programs, and television shows. But the use of lip synching, which nowadays is such a pervasive feature of "live" performance, especially in the performance of pop music, merely returns us to the idea that disclosing other voices within the body depends on intensifying the technological complexity of the performance.

Figure 5: Charles Ludlam and Lohr Wilson in Bluebeard*, Ridiculous Theatre Company, La MaMa Theater, New York, New York, 1970. Photo by Leandro Katz. Photo source: La MaMa Archives.*

That the quotation strategy is as much a technological as a cultural problem becomes even clearer when we acknowledge that the other voices within the body are also "outside" of it and that the performer's body possesses only limited capacity to signify all the otherwise transparent "other" voices defining the identity of either the performer or the person impersonated by the performer. Some stand-up comic performers, such as Lily Tomlin (b. 1939) and Robin Williams (1951-2014), have achieved considerable success through wonderful ability, in solo performance, to disclose all sorts of different voices (characters) within their bodies. But this variant of the quotation strategy has its limitations: it equates the disclosure of the other voice with the construction of a "character," and it confines the other voice (character) within a monologue format that inhibits dialogue between the voices within one body and the voices issuing from some "other" body or bodies. This variant, however, can achieve considerable complexity without relying much on technological daring. In 1986, a student in the Theatre Arts graduate program at San Jose State University, Jeff Richards, gave an amazing solo performance of about twenty minutes for me and another faculty member, Sandy Lanser.[7] Richards performed in the large open space of the department's studio theatre; he used no costume, and he lit the scene with light which spilled into the space from a few permanently hung lamps on the stage behind it. One might say that the "story" he wished to tell was how a multitude of voices within him sabotaged his efforts to tell a story. A man and a woman get in a car to go to the movies, but as they are driving, "differences" emerge between them, about their destination and then about their desires, and these differences motivate the utterance of a fantastic range of different voices within both the man and the woman; each new voice within one "character" triggers another new voice within the "other character." Richards even created the various "voices" of the car, birds and insects in the woods, the patter of rain, the sound of kisses, and so forth. The method of quotation was quite complicated. The voice of the man's mother contrasted with the voice of the woman's mother, but then the man might "appropriate" the voice of the woman's mother, and the woman would do the same for the voice of the man's mother. The man or woman might appropriate a spooky "Boris Karloff" *voice* to quote the sentimental *language* of romantic love; or each might appropriate a sex-kittenish, "Marilyn Monroe" voice to quote the language or jargon of political activism (ecological consciousness). Sometimes two voices, such as a "mother" voice and a "Boris Karloff" voice might intersect within the same sentence. Such speech compels the performer to traverse the entire empty space, and mere movement from far away to very close may produce a dramatic change of voice. The performance ends only because the performer has become physically exhausted, not because the story as such has been told. There is no story, no inscribed text; Richards makes up everything in "retrieving," so to speak, voices and scraps of language from a borderless, unsorted database in memory and recombining them into new and wilder relations. Without any dependence on an inscribed text, the "quality" of the performance varies significantly with each attempt to do it, but the point is nevertheless clear: release of the profusion of voices within the body depends on a much more imaginative notion of memory than mere memorization, which is a mode of inscribing language into the body, can offer.

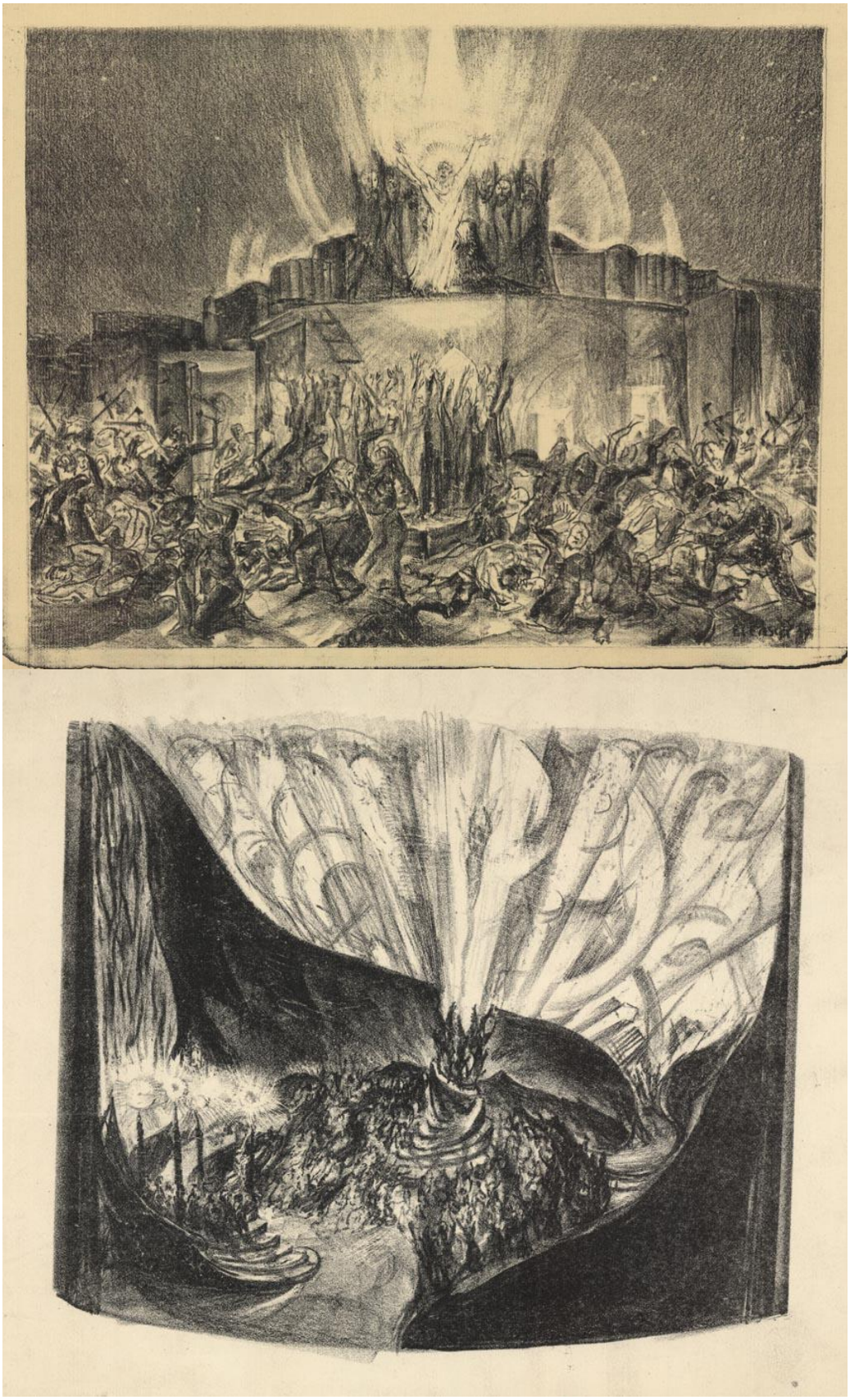

Figure 6: Lithographs by Eugene Fitsch (1892-1972) of scenes from Lazarus Laughed *by Eugene O'Neill, 1927. In a production of the play, directed by Gilmor Brown (1886-1960) in 1928 for the Pasadena Community Playhouse, 125 actors used 300 masks to play 400 roles. O'Neill prescribes the use of masks as follows: "All of these people are masked in*

accordance with the following complicated scheme: There are seven periods of life shown: Boyhood (or Girlhood), Youth, Young Manhood (or Womanhood), Manhood (or Womanhood) , Middle Age, Maturity and Old Age; and each of these periods is represented by seven different masks of general types of character as follows: The Simple, Ignorant; the Happy, Eager; the Self-Tortured, Introspective; the Proud, Self-Reliant; the Servile, Hypocritical; the Revengeful, Cruel; the Sorrowful, Resigned. Thus in each crowd (this includes among them the Seven Guests who are composed of one male of each period-type as period one-type one, period two type two, and so on up to period seven-type seven) there are forty-nine different combinations of period and type. Each type has a distinct predominant color for its costumes which varies in kind according to its period. The masks of the Chorus of Old Men are double the size of the others. They are all seven in the Sorrowful, Resigned type of Old Age." But Lazarus wears no mask. Lazarus Laughed, *New York, Liveright, 1927, 11-12. Photo source: The Old Print Shop.*

Yet Berg's *Lulu* already tells us that the temptation to inscribe all the voices is probably irresistible. Why, then, is it so rare to find any plays which explore these strategies and technologies of quotation? Another question: must the postmodern disclosure of other voices within the body consistently construct a comic, rather than "serious" or "dark," mood? Consider the difficulties of inscribing otherness into the bodies of performers. In 1927, Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) devised an elaborate scheme for the use of masks in his play *Lazarus Laughed.* Each actor in the play would wear many masks to reveal yet another aspect of his or her character. Each character consisted of seven "archetypal" features and seven "emotional" features, but because these features do not exist in isolation, performers had to employ masks combining both features. Thus, each actor would employ at least forty-nine separate masks in the performance of the character.[8] The complexity of the mask signification would increase enormously if the fourteen features designated in combination by all the masks did not apply to all characters but to only one character of fourteen in the whole play, which also contains nine separate choruses. Presumably each mask entailed the use of a different voice, thus allowing not only multiple voices within each actor but manifold voices within a large community. O'Neill apparently believed that masks provided a far greater and more powerful range of expression than the faces of the actors could ever supply. Though his scheme proved unworkable for the New York production of the play, the concept itself remains alive in relation to subsequent performance technologies. Suppose, for example, an author assigns forty-nine different voices to each character in a play with only seven characters, for a total of 303 different voices, some of which might be "spoken" with the use of computer and rewording technology. Obviously, the inscription of these voices would produce a text even more labyrinthine in its "legibility" than one of Bussotti's incredibly dense music theatre sores.

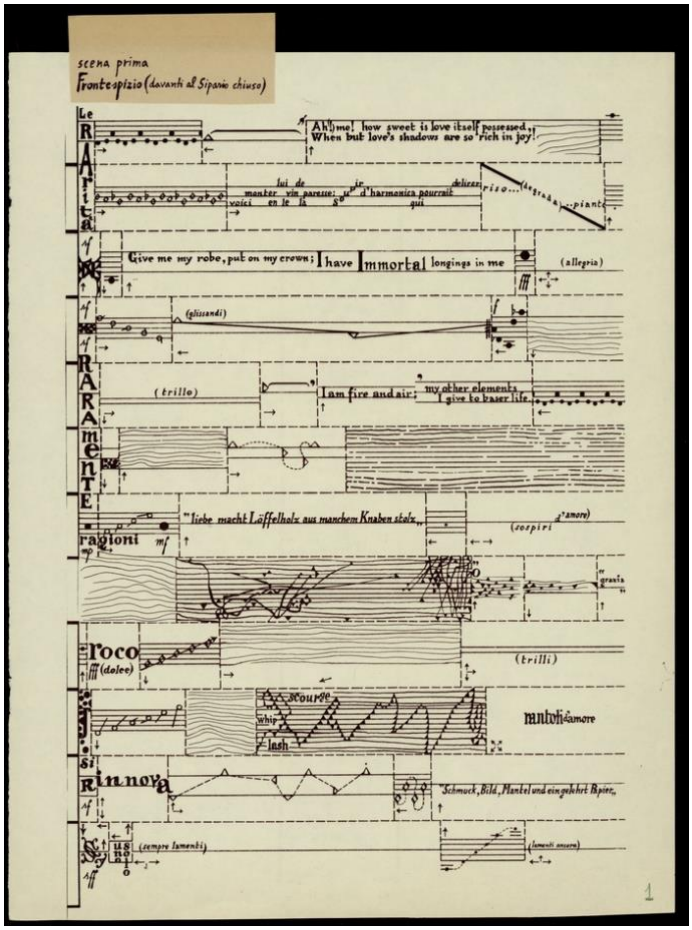

Figure 7: Score for La rarità. Potente, *music theater work by Sylvano Bussotti, 1979. Bussotti uses a highly idiosyncratic, personal form of notation to inscribe the relation between voices (speaking in English and German), instrumental music, and scenic effects. Deciphering the score, which may be one of Bussotti's "simpler" inscriptions, requires extensive explanation. But Bussotti proposes that a "reinscription" of theatrical space and performance entails new forms of notation or inscription. Photo source: Archivio Storico Ricordi Collezione Digitale.*

O'Neill's own sense of the other voice within the body remained, even in his expressionist plays, confined within the conventions of realism, with dialect being the most prominent device, and he fretted continually about his failure to find a genuinely "poetic" voice for the stage. But his addiction to realism in relation to spoken, rather than visual, signs probably stemmed from a profound distrust of the actor as well as of his writing talent, for he persistently inscribes in great detail just how the actor should speak drab or powerful lines. If we cannot trust actors to grasp the emotional values of "realistic" speech, how can we trust them to perform the "other" language of "poetic" consciousness? At any rate, by invoking O'Neill's experiment with masks as a corollary of Berg's intense effort to inscribe vocal performance, we can see how a "serious" or "dark" diselosure of other voices within the body depends, not on techno-quotational complexity alone, but on self-conscious theoretical or systematic complexity, which is quite lacking in the comic, improvisational performance by Richards, with its reliance on "inspiration" to make the most of material deposited in "random" memory.

Postmodernism, however, tends to avoid strong distinctions between "serious" and "comic" modes of performance, just as it blurs differences between text (author) and performance (performer): uncertainty of response is a calculated objective. When either text or performance emerges out of extensive quotation, the identity of the author becomes increasingly ambiguous. When technology and quotation get "out of control" in performance, it is because narrative expectations are no longer "in control" of either the motives or signifying practices that justify performance. Performance no longer shows "characters"; it deconstructs, through quotational strategies, the very idea of character, an imaginary being, as a product of narrative that tests the power of language or any signifying practice to make us believe something that did not "really" happen. For this reason, much of postmodern performance is unapologetically autobiographical. Yet the very notion of identity as a performance introduces the perception of a difference between calculated and "natural" configurations of signs. Thus, whereas modernism regarded realism as an effort to render transparent the difference between reality and representation by perfecting the illusion of "life itself," postmodernism regards realism ("honesty") as an effort to expose this difference by allowing representation to transgress implied borders that separate it from "reality." The result is that pleasure depends less upon the "believability" than upon the "appropriative" power of signs, with quotation being a persistent model of appropriation.

Let me examine postmodern attitudes toward the disclosure or appropriation of "other" voices within and without the body by analyzing three recent performances with which I've enjoyed some motivating or supervisory connection. The first was perhaps the least complex as far as its quotation of language, but perhaps the most complex as far as its quotation of voice. In the summer of 1990, Katrina Alexy, a student in the California State University Summer Arts program (Humboldt State University) performed an untitled solo piece for a course I supervised in performance art.[9] She instructed the audience to view the performance by standing on the lighting grid over the studio theatre, which the architecture of the building made a very easy task. The spectator stood directly above the performer and gazed down on her during the entire performance. The performance itself lasted about seven minutes and dramatized all the significant events in a "typical" day in the life of the strange, nameless character' impersonated by Alexy. This character lives in an apartment constructed out of a glass-sided crate, which Alexy had "found" along with several other objects she manipulated in the piece. The crate lay amid a messy tangle of blankets, pillows, props, and costume accessories; Alexy never left the zone filled by these objects, nor did she ever stand up fully during the performance.

The piece began slowly, with Alexy sleeping so that the top half of her slumbered in the glass crate, and it was as if she lay in some sort of incubator. With a black crayon, she had drawn a moustache on her face, and over the underwear in which she was sleeping she wore a stuffed jockstrap to indicate unmistakably that the character possessed a penis. But she made no effort to conceal any of the signs of her femininity: she wore lipstick, mascara, let her hair loose, exposed her cleavage somewhat, and did not perform any of her actions with an emphatically "masculine" identity. Soundtrack bells and voices summoned her to consciousness, and as she was waking, she writhed in a manner that was simultaneously masturbatory and a bizarre parody of a Goldilocks

figure trying to go to sleep in the little bear's bed. Once she was fully awake, however, she "mutated." She put on a costume that was partly a dress and partly a uniform. The tempo of the piece accelerated to an exhilarating speed, as Alexy compressed into a few minutes a multitude of actions and moods deploying a great variety of props. Among other actions, she fixed breakfast, made a telephone call, bought something in a store, worked as a waiter/waitress, drove her car, and bathed in a shower of rose petals dropped on her from the grid by the audience. In about the last thirty seconds, the tempo slowed greatly, as she undressed, crept into the apartment-incubator, and fell asleep again.

Because of the unusual perspective by which the audience viewed the piece, Alexy displayed an interesting ambivalence regarding the direction of her gaze: sometimes she gazed directly up at the audience and openly spoke to it; other times, she spoke as if to imaginary people all around her but not above her. A group of mirrors set at right angles to each other in a corner of the theatre reflected the performance in a complex manner: they not only produced multiple images of the scene; they produced multiple audience perspectives of the scene, so that the spectator in the grid saw the performance in a startling, cubistic way that allowed a ground-level view of the action which was nevertheless impossible to see from a conventional audience position.[9] For Alexy, sexual identity, as a postmodern condition, is a "performance" in which sexual difference, the difference between "male" and "female" signs, constitutes a tension within a body rather than between bodies. The body "appropriates" the signs of the "other" sex to achieve a more complete (powerful) identity. Congruent with the phenomenon of appropriation is an extremely accelerated tempo of life in which the body always seeks "more" of the moment than any dreamlike condition of incubational security can offer. To see sexuality from some new, "other" perspective means literally seeing the body perform from some "other" perspective than that which "normally" defines the relation between performer and spectator.

But perhaps the most complicated aspect of the performance was Alexy's use of voice. A cassette audiotape ran without stopping during the entire piece. The tape included Alexy's own voice, her voice impersonating "other" voices (male and female), voices recorded from other sources, such as old television and radio shows, a 1930s British music hall song (Alexy has a partially British heritage), an opera aria, some rock music, dialogues between voices, and then mixes of voices. But Alexy also spoke and sang "live" during the performance. She engaged in dialogue with taped voices; sometimes she lip-synched her own or other voices; and at one point, she impersonated "live" another voice which engaged in dialogue with her "real," taped voice. The performance explicitly linked the kaleidoscopic profusion of voices within the body to the performer's power to expose technology as the phenomenon that blurs distinctions, not between "real" and fictional identities, but between "real" and programmed identities. In effect, the use of tape technology in this manner is an extreme mode of inscription and quotation that pressures the live performer to speak only that which can be spoken within the predetermined and inflexible constraints of the blank sections of the tape. But the blank sections are so intricately embedded within the tape that the live performer must use her voice much like a musical instrument within an ensemble of instruments: she must speak exactly on time or the "other" voices drown her out. The live performer must listen with great sensitivity to the "other" voices, but the other

voices never listen to her. Alexy's use of voice obviously owes much to the aesthetics of voice overlay and distortion that sampler and mixing technology have given to rock and rap music. In this case, however, Alexy exploited the technology on behalf of a far greater range of quotation and a much more complex idea of vocal collage than we find in the music world. A major irony of the piece, then, is that although the strange, ambisexual creature impersonated by Alexy appears highly constrained by time, space, habit, technology, and the limits of sexual difference, the spectator nevertheless witnesses a very powerful assertion of freedom: we see a body that does not fear, does not seem trapped by, all the differences or "otherness" circumscribing it.

Alexy's perception of power and voice contrasts dramatically with that defining another untitled piece constructed by Todd Memnott while he was a graduate student at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1990. Memnott has performed different versions of the piece in a variety of contexts, mostly "performance clubs." I invited him to do it in the studio theatre at San Jose State University, but he could have performed it in a large lecture hall or a conventional classroom, for the piece obviously adopted the academic lecture as its model for the deployment of voice and language.[9] Unlike Alexy's piece, Memnott's piece was not scenically or technologically complex: he asked only for two portable blackboards, some chalk, and a podium. Neither did he make any effort to impersonate a range of "other" voices within him; he simply assumed and sustained the "authoritative" voice of someone enthused about the knowledge he was imparting through a lecture. Memnott's background is in art, not theatre, and this background perhaps explains the peculiar relation between voice, language, and image shaping the performance. While the piece lacked the vocal complexity of Alexy's, it displayed a much more complex perception of *language* in performance, especially in its use of writing as an element of performance. Memnott spoke, not from a script, but from notes, which he was constantly revising, and this notion of a "partially" inscribed performance granted the speaker a measure of improvisatory freedom in finding the language and voice to say "completely" what he never finished writing. Indeed, Memnott told me that whenever he performed the piece, he got "lost" in digressions that he actually intended as clarifications of the notes.

The first part of the piece lasted about twenty minutes and began with Memnott speaking in a serious tone about "the sexual identity of the image." The speaker maintained the serious tone throughout the piece, and even though the audience found amusing his obvious, satiric use of postmodern academic critical jargon, the piece was in no sense a parody of those arcane modes of postmodern theoretical discourse' which popular consciousness tends to regard as impenetrable, and which a group like the V-Girls does parody by adopting obviously "playful" voices that tell the audience, "we're not serious, we're just having fun with some absurd pretensions." Ostensibly, the purpose of Memnott's "lecture" is to expose or explain an oppressive, "terrorist" relation between image and gaze. All formations of power and identity emanate from the tension between gaze and image, between seeing and being seen. Does the gaze construct the image or does the image channel the gaze? Power asserts itself through bipolar structuring of perception, in which one perception dominates "the other." As Saussure understood, the existence of language itself depends on a bipolarity of perception that is "already present" in the gaze-image dynamic. A problem of postmodern culture is to determine the extent to which perceptions, desires, and their power valences are masculine or

feminine. But every question of sexual difference is inevitably a question of "the body," which is either the agent of the gaze or the object of the gaze. It seems that discourse on "the body" will liberate us from an oppressive metaphysics of presence that perpetually defers desire by deflecting the gaze onto the image (the referent) instead of onto the Real (the sign). The performance, however, does not affirm, even if it does not actually contradict, what the speaker is *saying*.

Memnott presents no theory of his own; instead, he summarizes theories that are already well-known within advanced intellectual circles. But his method of treating the ideas as ideograms of a performance is quite intriguing from a theoretical perspective. He uses the two blackboards to set up the bipolar tensions. On one blackboard, labeled "the gaze," he inscribes in list form, as he mentions them, the names of various theorists: Nietzsche (1844-1900), Derrida (1930-2004), Bataille (1897-1962), Lacan (1901-1981), Baudrillard (1929-2007), Heidegger (1889-1976), Adorno (1903-1969), Foucault (1926-1984); after he writes down the name, he "pairs" it with some label or phrase that puts an almost indecipherable complex of ideas "in a word." "Bataille—excess"; "Baudrillard –-simulacrum"; "Lacan -- the mirror stage"; "Nietzsche --the invisible"; "Heidegger -- the unspeakable," and so forth. On the other board, labeled "the image," Memnott inscribes, not in list fashion, words which apparently one could not ascribe to any one theorist but which were significant in relation to any theory of the gaze-image dynamic: "the body," "ecstasy," "phallus," "desire," "negation -- excrementation," "language," "knowledge," and so forth. He speaks very quickly, and he scrawls so hastily that some of the words are illegible. Speech invests the *image* of the word with meaning. But of course, the lecture is an effort to "draw" connections between all the words, and Memnott does precisely that: he draws relations between the words on each blackboard with arrows, circles, and brackets.

But these relations introduce new terms, which he inscribes, and to explain these new terms, he draws diagrams, which entail more new terms, whose explanations then motivate the drawing of crude human figures. The body appears as a diagram of language. But in being a diagram, language appears "contained" within an image, within writing. And yet, this image is virtually unintelligible without the spoken commentary about it. The bipolar image of power grows increasingly dense with inscription. Memnott superimposes words and diagrams upon each other--he never erases anything. Humor emerges from his urgent efforts to find some empty fragment of space on the blackboards to inscribe yet another term. If one idea contradicts another, he simply writes the contradictory word over the contradicted word. The theorists all contradict each other because arrows leading from their terms produce other terms which release arrows that "cut through" their names to some "other" name. Eventually arrows from one board must cross over to the other board. Together, the two blackboards project an image of incredible complexity. It is a major irony of the piece: as the image becomes messier, the ideas become clearer. The spectator "sees," not the bipolar image of power unmasked by theoretical discourse, but the power of performance to subvert the "clarity" of bipolar constructions of perception. As the difference between gaze and image becomes more and more obscure, so too does the difference between writing and drawing, between the body and language, between dominant and submissive modes of signification, between masculine and feminine values. What appears to be and sounds like a lecture is actually a complicated process of making a mysterious artwork. This artwork, however, is merely

the sign of the other, almost transparently ambiguous artwork that constructs both the gaze and the image, namely the performance.

The performance, then, through its ingenious use of quotation, collapses distinctions between theoretical discourse and artistic creation. Memnott further intensifies the collapse by twice interrupting the lecture to read passages from an "autobiographical novel." Here the "I" of the speaker acquires a voice; but inserted into the lecture, the overtly literary language sounds no less strange and mysterious than the jargon-saturated language of theoretical discourse. We do not seem to mind if "poetic" language is difficult to decode, but we do seem to mind if "theoretical" language becomes "unnecessarily" complex. Memnott, however, satirizes even this manifestation of bipolarity. Not only do the recited passages blur distinctions between memoir and fiction, but they also obfuscate the difference between theoretical and fictive productions of discourse. Theories of identity and stories of the "I" are both mirrors of the imaginary, of the invisible, whose power to dissolve the transparency of language and the body does not depend on differences between them. The real problem is to free the voice, the body, not from language, but from the text, from writing, from the image of language. Thus, during the second recitation from the novel, Memnott threw the manuscript away, declaring it a type of excrement. A few moments later, he tore up his lecture notes, saying that nothing on the board turned out the way the notes said it was supposed to look anyway.

Yet the idea that the "uninscribed" voice signifies a desired condition of liberation is questionable. The lecture purports to explain theories that unmask the illusions, the myths, the pathological relations between gaze and image that oppress the spectator and keep desire in a constant state of deferral. But of course, the explanation becomes messier and messier, and it is as if the speaker were speaking in a secret code that he pretends his audience knows. The audience, however, only knows that it doesn't know what it is assumed to know--the code of those who know how to "speak freely." While the performance works to collapse the bipolar image of power, the relation between the performance and its audience is one of intensifying bipolarity, as the speaker becomes more remote and mysterious to the audience through his use of a highly exclusive language which he nevertheless speaks with great naturalness ("freedom"). The first part of the performance ends when Memnott turns from the board abruptly and says to the audience: "Any questions?" After a chuckle, silence grips the audience. No one has any questions, even though no one has understood everything, if, indeed, anything at all. The strategy of inviting dialogue with the audience merely discloses the power of the speaker to appropriate or stifle the voice of the spectator. The idea that dialogue, as a mode of "free" discourse, begins or emerges out of questions is yet another illusion constructed through the bipolar image of power.

Eventually questions do emerge, but these are of a trivial nature, focused, as so many "dialogues" between performer and spectator are, on the intentions or conditions which produced the work, rather than on the significance of what was actually seen: "How long have you been working on this piece?" "Where else have you done the piece?" "Do you think of yourself as collaborating with all these philosophers?" The greatest irony of all, then, is that the speaker's effort to unmask or "deconstruct" the bipolar structure of power constraining the release of a "free" voice winds up stabilizing perception of performance as

a power in tension with that of the audience to speak for itself, for silence in this case is hardly a sign of freedom. To collapse the bipolar tensions is to perform a sort of terrorist act that leaves people "lost" somewhere between the gaze and the image, where the voice is "free" of either. Being free means being lost, and the voice, rather than the gaze or the image, is the dominant sign of freedom.

But perhaps it is significant that the innovative attitudes toward voice, dialogue, and quotation in the work of Alexy, Memnott, and Richards support an aesthetic that is peculiar to *solo* performance. The inclination to internalize dialogue and "other" voices within a single performer derives from the economic realities controlling postmodern performance. Because they do not wait for a text to tell them what to do and because conventional modes of theatrical production are not very receptive to their messy way of working, many performers with postmodern sensibilities often find it very difficult to build performances out of collaborations. Solo performance is cheap and mobile, but it has the effect of linking the phenomenon of performance to a condition of being *alone*: you can't count on voices in other bodies to produce sufficiently self-conscious dialogue that "frees" the voice from all sorts of otherwise transparent narrative constraints. It is clear, however, that spoken dialogue between bodies does not occur more often in postmodern performance because performers themselves are so bewildered by the complexities of postmodern collaboration, in which the whole ideology of appropriation collapses the hierarchical distributions of power that normally motivate and control group activity.

Let me clarify this problem of dialogue in postmodern performance by discussing another piece produced at Humboldt in summer of 1990. I myself participated in the piece, which bore the title, *Bondage Dance*. Although it lasted only seven minutes and was the result of less than ten hours work over three days, the piece was, from an aesthetic perspective, the most complex performance in which I've ever been involved.[9] One of my students, Birdi Olivarez-McCullough, said she wanted to do a dance with me, even though I have no formal dance training. I told her that we should build the performance out of relations between various materials we had on hand: pieces of cloth, a blue silk rope, a huge dance mirror on wheels, an overhead projector, a rolling desk chair. We spent a couple of hours playing with all this stuff, yet the thing which most interested me was the possibility of our dancing blindfold together, so that we conveyed the impression of being intimately trustful of each other's bodies without being able to see each other. It was, frankly, a stunt to distract the audience's attention away from my lack of dance skill. But the image of blind trust between bodies became inseparable from the perception of bodies in bondage to each other, and so we decided to complicate the stunt by leashing ourselves together by using both ends of the silk rope to make nooses around our necks. As a result, Birdi felt the piece projected a sadomasochistic mood, and she confided a measure of amazement to her roommate, Cynthia Lynville-White, who expressed a desire to make an off-stage contribution to the project. Then other students decided they wanted to participate. One of these, Kara Evers, said she found any image of sadomasochism abhorrent; and yet she made several quite luminous suggestions for perfecting the performance. A music student, Arman Boyles, seeing one of the rehearsals, offered to compose music for the piece on a digital sampler. Thus, the music fit the dance rather than the other way around. It is very difficult to say who was the author of the *Bondage Dance* because the noisy process of production, which entailed numerous simultaneous dialogues between

participants, allowed many decisions about the performance to thrive independently of other decisions.

Figure 8: 2025 semi-accurate watercolor sketch that reconstructs the opening of the Bondage Dance*, with Birdi lying on the floor, under a spotlight, as a large, mobile dance mirror rolls backward over her pulled by the second couple. A gold silk cord binds the first, blindfold couple. The mirror reflected glints of light from the audience. A purple cloth is draped around the frame of the mirror. In performance, the second couple was less visible than appears in the drawing, but they were by no means hidden. CSU Summer Arts performance program, Humboldt State University, 1990. Sketch and Photo sources: Karl Toepfer (b. 1948). See note 9.*

In collage fashion, the piece requires the spectator to process signs transmitted congruently from conflicting pressures on perception; over one hundred cues occurred within several minutes to produce very turbulent, dynamic relations between bodies, time, and space. For example, the piece begins with the audience staring at the image of itself in a huge dance mirror on wheels. I stood, blindfold-masked, on the wheelbase of the mirror. Birdi was the only barefoot performer. When lights went down, music began, and a spotlight went up. The mirror, pulled by a man (Marc Gibson) and a woman (Kara Evers) on each side, rolled back, and in doing so, rolled over the blindfolded body of a woman (Birdi) lying face up on the floor, creating an astonishing mirror-reflection of her. The mirror stopped for only an instant when the gold silk rope noosed around my neck and hers became taut; I commanded her to "get up," then I stepped off the mirror, and we began our dance in the spotlight. But the mirror also "danced"; piloted by Marc and Kara, who were not "invisible" stagehands (as in Kabuki), for they wore white costumes in contrast to the dark garments worn by the blindfolded dancers, the huge mirror glided swiftly and assertively, back and forth, as well as laterally. The reflected image was, of course, highly unstable, as if it

constantly veered off at different angles and directions. The mirror reflected not only the bodies of the masked dancers, but dimly perceived portions of the audience, too, creating a giddy, swerving sense of motion to the whole scene. In short, the mirror image of bodies in bondage to each other contributed to a "dark," intensifying atmosphere of freedom. Moreover, the "dancing" mirror picked up glints and slivers of light from obscure points within the dark auditorium, and these flashed or zipped across the glass somewhat like sparkling moths. A curious visual irony unfolded. The image of sadomasochism separated the unmasked couple from each other; it constantly remained between the seeing man and woman, no matter how deftly they made the image "dance." By contrast, the bodies of the blindfolded couple always appeared very close to each other, even though they could not see either each other or the image of sadomasochism, which we normally associate with excessive narcissism. An implication of this signification is that pleasurable, "intimate," and "forbidden" knowledge of the Other's body does not depend on seeing the body or seeing anything.

Yet the visual irony grew more elaborate. Decorously draped around the frame of the mirror, like a voluptuous curtain, was a large, imperial piece of purple cloth. Midway through the performance, Marc and Kara stopped the mirror and unfurled the cloth in front of the blindfolded couple, so that Birdi and myself were between the cloth and the mirror. At the same instant, the spotlight went out, and an overhead projector, operated by Bounma Chan from an otherwise dark corner at the rear of the space, cast a low angle beam onto the dancers. The audience saw before it the stretched-out banner-screen, upon which appeared a large iris-disk of lurid reddish-violet light, created by applying a magenta gel over the glass plate of the projector. Within the iris glow, one saw the gyrating shadows of the blindfolded dancers. But the audience saw more: Marc and Kara performed undulating movements, and these actions caused the cloth, the iris, and the shadows to undulate, too, in surging ripples. Moreover, the small red glow of the projector bulb itself penetrated the cloth slightly to the right of the iris it projected. A spectator later remarked that this eerie red signal reminded her of a voyeuristic "eye" that magnified the whole sensation of seeing something to which the audience is otherwise "blind." Other spectators said the effect of the little light, which none of us had even considered, was that of a "wound" somehow inflicted upon the cloth, which they apparently perceived as a metaphor for flesh. Yet another spectator believed the light signified a "heart" pulsating in waves of "purple desire." At the same time, however, the blindfolded dancers introduced a new stunt, which began with Birdi pushing me into a swivel chair on wheels. We then performed a startling chair-dance which culminated with her tying me up in the chair by spinning me into the rope that tethered us together; then she unspun me, and I pulled her down to her knees. But all these actions appeared as silhouettes in the iris-glow projected onto the cloth. When I stood up and pushed the chair away, another huge action occurred as the purple cloth sailed over our heads and stretched out behind us, while the projector moved swiftly in an arc from the rear corner to a point directly before us: the "eye" assumed the position of a front row spectator. The shadows of the blindfolded dancers were now behind them, but still on the billowing purple screen, while the dancers themselves appeared to bask in a sultry orangish refulgence.

Figure 9: Rough, schematic watercolor sketch of the first couple between the billowing purple cloth and the dance mirror. The projector with the red gel turned the purple cloth a reddish hue, but in performance, the first couple looked more silhouetted than, as in the sketch, veiled. For one movement, Birdi looped the gold silk cord over her arms. The red "eye," "heart," or "wound" cast by the projector bulb appears on Birdi's chest. Bondage Dance, *CSU Summer Arts, Humboldt State University, 1990. Photo and sketch: Karl Toepfer.*

The piece concluded when I lifted Birdi, spun her around several times, and then threw her and myself on the floor directly before the projector, so that we both knelt before the lens and before the audience, somewhat like a couple posing for a snapshot at the beach. Marc and Kara moved the cloth screen close behind us. With gloved hand, I pulled off Birdi's blindfold, then my own, and both of us stared into the projector/audience, smiling a little. The huge shadow of Bounma's hand appeared on the cloth as he drew lines, a kind of mask, on our faces by scrawling on the gel sheet with a felt-tip marker; the machine projected the scrawls onto the "naked" faces of the dancers, and it was as if this action blurred distinctions between conditions of incision and inscription. Bounma rapidly wrote several Chinese characters, parts of which were projected onto the cloth and other parts onto my face; then Marc and Kara let the cloth fall, completely shrouding Birdi and myself. They themselves then plunged to the floor and burrowed against the shrouded bodies, as if bonded to the shrouded couple by a force as powerful as gravity. All along, the piece had shown that the desires shared by one couple to know without seeing (illusions, images) remained "bound" to the desires of another couple to see that to which others are blind. The pleasure of one couple depends on the pleasure of the other, yet these pleasures are not the same. The projector bulb gleamed in the mirror for a moment before Bounma switched it off; in the darkness, the drumming pulse throbbing against a

very deep pedal point continued for a few seconds, then stopped to bring the piece to an end.

As for the dances of the blindfolded couple, these unfolded according to the stunt-value they acquired because of being performed blindfolded. Even without blindfolds, the dances were tricky to perform, not because they required any virtuoso technique, but because they required each dancer to shift abruptly from a "dominant" to a "submissive" movement as determined by the tautness of the rope to signify the shifting, highly unstable exchange of power between the performers. A powerful tension between man and woman "bound" them into a couple. It was a matter of showing the ambiguity of the tautness: each performer converted a condition of "domination" into one of "submission." The chief sign of domination was the power of one body to loop the rope around the neck, torso, hands, or waist of the other body. Other movements disclosed no special power to signify domination, and these movements included spinning, twisting, kneeling, arching, pulling, pushing, pressing, hunching, lunging, flinching, swaying, and grasping. A peculiar visual irony emerged, for example, when a kneeling body appeared to dominate a standing body because the arms of the standing body were bound while those of the kneeling body were free to tug on the ropelike a leash. Some of the actions, such as throwing a body to the floor or pouncing on a body, reached an intense level of visceral violence, for Birdi and myself suffered several bruises, cuts, and rope burns--but no pain. It is important to remember that the pleasure signified and experienced through the performance resulted from our linking pleasure to the *simulation* of "dominant" and "submissive" constructions of power and trust and that the audience perceived this grounding of pleasure in the phenomenon of simulation, not in some painful reality which the performance merely represented. Bondage is pleasurable insofar as it is a mode of play-acting, a complex game with precise rules for exchanging the masks of power.

Obviously, the piece relied on very dense visual signification, and this density conforms apparently to a pervasive postmodern distrust of language to "say" anything "true." Indeed, we had considered complicating the visual aspect even further by using two video cameras which would view the dance from competing perspectives, but it was not possible to obtain video screens large enough to make a worthwhile impact on perception. The piece should have concluded with the great mirror moving forward, toward the audience, as the "eye" of the projector gleamed in it before being switched off, but this seemingly small action required more time to perfect than was available to us. A conventional attitude is that such an elaborate preoccupation with visual effects and image either "distracts" from anything spoken or compensates for the semantic poverty of spoken signs. However, the complexity of visual signification in the performance motivated a corresponding complexity of spoken signification. The piece contained three layers of speech: 1) a monologic voice spoken by Cynthia through a microphone from the rear of the audience; 2) scripted dialogue spoken by Birdi and myself; 3) unscripted dialogue spoken by Birdi and myself. The scripted dialogue of the dancers alternated with the monologic voice of the unseen woman. This dialogue consisted of stichomythic exchanges of lines, mostly commands and questions, rendered ironically. For example, a body in "submission" would utter a command: "Harder, harder: feel my strength," while a "dominating" body would respond with a question: "Can you feel my heart? Can you touch it?" The unscripted dialogue consisted of speech which the audience could see spoken but could not hear

clearly, whispers exchanged between Birdi and myself which, because we could not see what we were doing, communicated helpful information regarding the execution of our performance. We reminded each other of the next position to assume; we asked, "Are you all right?" after performing some risky action; we commented on the pleasure we felt in accomplishing a particular stunt. Such dialogue excluded the audience from a measure of intimacy or trust which nevertheless appeared as an element of the performance. The tension between scripted and unscripted dialogues dramatized the perception that what one desires strangers to hear said requires some "other" voice to say, not what isn't worth being heard by strangers, but what is knowable only to a body which is very close to the speaker, "in bondage," perhaps. In this respect, the tension between the two forms of dialogue attempted to objectify the "bondage" defining the relation between performance and audience.

As for the monologue, this added a further layer of ambiguity, because its author and speaker, Cynthia, embedded in it an attitude toward sadomasochism which contrasted strongly with that cultivated by the dancing couples. Cynthia's language projected an aura of confession, which linked conditions of bondage with feelings of guilt and a pathological urge for punishment. The confessional nakedness of her language conveyed a rather conventional perception of sadomasochism as a compulsive aberration or "problem," like masturbation in unenlightened circles, I suppose, that possessed redemptive value insofar as one spoke of it as a demonic condition over which one had triumphed. Unlike the dancers, Cynthia did not see bondage as a strange form of play, an experiment in pleasure; she saw it as a kind of tragic fate. Several people within the group complained to me that the monologue was not "appropriate" and that Cynthia should say something less oppressive. I myself wished that her language did more to challenge the stereotypical view of sadomasochism as a disease in need of a cure or transcendence (more "estrangement" or irony). But collaborations are interesting to the extent that they accommodate "other" voices. So personal or confessional in its rhetoric, the monologue actually intensified the atmosphere of vulnerability, for even though the language itself seemed saturated with conventional remorse and exculpation, it nevertheless took courage to speak it. Moreover, Cynthia spoke in a low, mellow voice that reverberated excellently through the microphone system, an effect that, superimposed over the drones, ostinatos, syncopations, and eerie, "electronic" melody of the music, added a touch of ominous glamor to the performance.

But I believe the performance would have benefited from yet another layer of speech consisting of pre-recorded and mixed voices emanating from a second tape-deck or even a digital sampler. Such speech, interspersed between the monologue and the scripted dialogue, might include fragments of arias, orgasmic utterances, quotations from movies, distorted echoes of "live" speech, a piece of poetry. But the preparation of such a soundtrack requires much time. What is significant about all these layers of speech is that they comprise fragments of language thar do not depend on a specific narrative context to achieve maximum signifying power; one can recombine and reconfigure these fragments, like a relational database, into new, surprising juxtapositions which liberate performance from "bondage" to a text and the stabilization of signs that a text represents. The greater the density of visual and spoken signs, the greater is the freedom to recombine the signs into "other" performances. The database of signs, being, like language itself, larger than any specific configuration (text), allows the performers to extend or compress an initial configuration into a performance that is substantially different from previous deployments

of the signs. When people say that complex visual significations "distract" from or undermine the signifying power of language, what they mean, apparently, is that visual density weakens the power of narrative to unify and stabilize perception through such devices as "character," which is nothing more than the construction of human identity by a single, repeatable voice. In the visual kaleidoscope of the *Bondage Dance*, speech had no difficulty achieving considerable expressive power, and indeed, complaints about Cynthia's monologue entailed a worry that her words might depress the visual opulence of the piece. This was not a piece about "characters" who have a "story" to tell that tests the audience's capacity to "believe" something imaginary; it was a piece about the pleasure-bonding of unnamed bodies, with voices treated as fragments of bodies. Visual density undermines master narrative expectations, not language. Narrative expectations do not bond bodies together pleasurably--they hold bodies in "bondage" to the idea that pleasure is a text, a repeatable configuration of signs, inscribed into the body, not by Language, but by constraints on intelligence that "blind" people to signs themselves more than bodies. What bonds bodies together are signs which narratives render transparent to maintain the comforting illusion that one's closeness to a body is not arbitrary but the result of a pressure, a referent, an imaginary identity that makes reality "always other" than the signs of it.

The observation will emerge that, given the evidence from the performances discussed here, these postmodern strategies for deploying voice, these densities of visual and spoken signification cannot sustain a performance beyond several minutes. However, the performances were not longer because the resources to make them longer were not available. Indeed, audiences for all the performances expressed the desire to see more of what they had watched. The densities of signification described here are not so complex that audiences can endure or process them only in small doses. On the contrary: if audiences for conventional theatre productions of plays are not hungrier for more, it is because such productions seriously underestimate the cognitive capacity of audiences to process large, multi-layered quantities of sensory data. Postmodernism exerts tremendous pressure on performers and designers to master and exceed unprecedented thresholds of signifying capacity. Obviously, complex technologies make a difference in reaching these thresholds. But technology merely produces discourses that expose "other" voices within the body that conventional narrative discourse, in its effort to regulate desire, the body, and human identity, cannot contain by assuming that the consistency of voice defining a character will "unify" the "differences," the ambiguity, defining a body. But why should we assume that narrative itself must establish its power by sustaining "consistency" of signification over a sufficient threshold of time? We can string together into a single performance all the performances described here and not be any further removed from some form of narrative than this article which describes them. Of course, this strategy implies that the postmodern voice does not destroy narrative--it appropriates it, "plays" with it, while playwrighting as such merely reveals the archaic power of narrative to appropriate voice, a power which audiences find increasingly hard to associate with conditions of liberation or the movement of desire.

Notes

1 I have earlier examined the "dramatic" relation between voice and historical context in "Strategies of Temporal-Spatial Appropriation in Postmodern Aesthetic Performance: Parts I and II," *Theater Three*, Nos. 6 (Spring 1989), pp. 69-86 and 7 (Fall 1989), 48-67; "From Imitation to Quotation," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism,* 5/2 (Spring 1991), pp. 121-136.

2 Arnolt Bronnen, *Die Exzesse* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1923); republished in Arnolt Bronnen, *Werke,* Vol. 1 (Klagenfurt: Ritter, 1990), pp. 273- 349; documentation on pp. 378-394.

3 George Perle, *The Operas of Alban Berg,* Vol. 2, Lulu (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 67: "The non-verbal symbols of Berg's music add new dimensions to the mythic aspect of Wedekind's masterpiece. The structural symmetries within which the characters are bound in the play, and which give them an almost puppet like helplessness that mocks their supposedly willed behavior, are clarified and strengthened in the operatic version."

4 I discuss the use of voice in *Totenmal* in much greater detail in *Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture 1910-1935* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 306-311. See also, Susan Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 148-160; Barbara Hales, "Waking the Dead: Medium as Therapist in Albert Talhoff and Mary Wigman's *Totenmal*," in *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 40/1 (July 2013), 58-73.

5 Audiences for super-spectacular rock concerts do not seem to mind that the bodies of the performers appear very small to them and at a great distance from them. Technological support for the performance does little to "compensate" for the diminished sense of the live body. Rather, technology pervasively constructs an oversized image of the performer(s) that shapes the spectator's relation to the performing body. The performance therefore functions to verify the image and prove that the authenticity or credibility of the image depends upon the existence of a "real" body. A body is "real" insofar as it must work hard to "live up" to an image, which is why rock performers experience exhausting pressure to expend enormous amounts of energy in performance.

6 For documentation on Brecht's quotations in this play, see Bertolt Brecht, *Collected Plays*, Vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1971), 435-438.

7 Ms. Lanser invited me to the performance after she had been the only spectator at a previous performance. Richards was afraid there was no audience for his radical style of performance, and Ms. Lanser was trying to expand his confidence to pursue this direction. It seems, however, that Richards' ability to perform so wildly depended on his having such a highly exclusive audience, even though Ms. Lanser and myself realized that much larger audiences could appreciate his performance aesthetic. But postmodern aesthetics obviously appealed to Richards because it allowed him to communicate, intimately, with extremely fragmented audiences, as electronic media does.

8 For more about O'Neill's mask scheme, see Jean Chothia, *Forging a Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 84-87. See also: Civetta, Peter. "(Well, at least) Lazarus laughed—O'Neill, religious drama, and stageability," *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 20/1 (2008), 27-52; Cunningham, Frank R. "*Lazarus Laughed*: a study in O'Neill's romanticism," in *Studies in the Twentieth Century* 15 (1975), 51-75.

9 Unfortunately, photo documentation of all the student performances is not available. At CSU Summer Arts, neither I nor any of the students had cameras. We considered using video cameras to record the *Bondage Dance*, but this was impractical, because we didn't have enough crew to run the cameras, nor, in any case, could the cameras see the action under the given lighting conditions without considerable rehearsal and technical testing, the time for which was unavailable. When I wrote this essay in 1991, the administration at San Jose State University was debating policy revisions regarding the use of student course work in faculty research, including performance works. I waited for policy clarification that did not happen until much later, when I had forgotten about the essay. The status of the student works was complex. Only Jeff Richards was a student at San Jose State University, where I taught as a tenure track member of the Department of Theater Arts. None of the students at CSU Summer Arts came from San Jose State University. Katrina Alexy performed her piece as an assignment for my CSU Summer Arts course in performance art. But the *Bondage Dance* was not a course assignment but a collaborative project involving students who wanted to produce a piece for an audience at the end of the Summer Arts program. The piece was open to the public. Moreover, some of the students who participated in the *Bondage Dance* were not in my performance art course. By the time I finished this essay, all the students in my course or in the *Bondage Dance* had either graduated or transferred to other schools. All these peculiarities encouraged me to forget about the essay. But fortunately, I have remembered it thirty-four years later, because the immensely imaginative accomplishments of these students deserve to be remembered.